



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE NORWEGIAN KINGS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

THE great age of Old Norse literature began with the twelfth century. For more than two hundred years there was a continued production of sagas and poems, of charters and laws. Much of this literature was, it is true, the product of earlier ages now for the first time put into written form; but a large part was original. From the medieval writings of Western Europe it differs in certain important respects: it was not written in the language of the learned, but in the speech of the people, not by clerks but by cultured laymen; the clerk and the monk wrote amid cloistered surroundings and consequently the church and all its belongings occupy a prominent place in their writings; the scalds and the sagamen had other interests—their stories deal more with kings and chiefs, with warfare and politics. While these tales cannot always be relied on in matters of narrative history, the student of social and political institutions will find in them a source of much valuable information.¹ The importance of Old Norse literature for the study of early Germanic society has long been understood; but it is only within the last generation that historians have begun to realize that these writings may also be used to illustrate institutional developments that are medieval rather than Germanic. Sophus Bugge's contention that the Eddic myths are merely Norse versions of legends current in Western Europe during the Viking age may never be universally accepted;² but there is no doubt a large measure of truth in the statement that Scandinavian thought in the closing centuries of heathendom contained a large fund of borrowed ideas. A most favorable period for the intro-

¹ In preparing this paper I have made considerable use of the following sagas: Snorre's *Heimskringla*. Snorre's dates are 1178–1241. The references are to Morris and Magnusson's translation: *The Stories of the Kings of Norway* (London, 1894).

Flateyrbok (eds. Vigfusson and Unger, Christiania, 1860–1868). The Flatey Book dates from 1370–1380 but the sagas contained are evidently of earlier origin.

Fagrskinna (eds. Munch and Unger, Christiania, 1847). This is a briefer form of the *King-sagas* dating from the thirteenth century (1230–1240). The author seems to have used the same sources that Snorre made use of, at least in part.

² *Helge-Digtene i den Ældre Edda* (Copenhagen, 1896).

duction of foreign customs came in the ninth and tenth centuries when the reputed descendants of Woden were reshaping Northern society along national lines and establishing new institutions, such as a national kingship with all that the term implies. Nearly all the rulers of Norway during the tenth and eleventh centuries had spent years abroad either as vikings, mercenary chiefs or exiles before they were admitted to the kingship; and it is only natural that in the arrangement of their own courts and surroundings they should imitate the institutions of other princely households.

As the medieval Norse writers were usually men who spent a large part of their time at the royal court, they naturally allude freely to the men and the affairs of the king's garth. On the subject of court customs much information can be found in the *King's Mirror* or *Speculum Regale*,³ a unique document dating from about 1200, the ostensible purpose of which is to instruct a youth how to demean himself in the various walks of life, especially in the royal presence. Some use can also be made of the royal charters dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of which a considerable number have come down to us.⁴ But by far the best source for our present purpose is the *Court Law* of Magnus Lawmender (1263-1280),⁵ a revision of an earlier law that was probably put into form in the reign of King Sverri whose rule of thirty eventful years closed in 1202.

I.

From the earliest years of the Norse monarchy the king's guard seems to have formed an organized corps subject to certain definite laws or customs. We get a glimpse of such a corps in the reign of Harold Fairhair, the first Norwegian king.⁶ How complete and definite this organization was in the ninth century cannot be known; but by the thirteenth it had developed into a somewhat elaborate form. There existed then in the king's garth (the chapel service not included) four distinct but closely related guilds, all organized for the purpose of guarding or serving the king, each in its own way. Of these the king himself was only a member, though naturally the most influential and powerful one. These four groups

³ *Kongs-skuggsio* (Sorøe, 1768). Later editions by Keyser, Munch and Unger (Christiania, 1848) and by Brenner (Munich, 1881).

⁴ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (Christiania, 1847-1871).

⁵ *Hirðskraa*, in *Norges Gamle Love* (Old Norse Laws), II. Abbreviated to *N. G. L.: H.*

⁶ *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (Oxford, 1883), I. 257. See Larson, *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest* (*Univ. of Wis. Bulletin*, 1904), p. 157.

were the "hirdmen", the "gests", the "candle-swains" and the "house-carles". Usually the complete household was spoken of as the "hird" (*hirð*), a term that suggests an Old English origin;⁷ but more specifically this term was used for the most important corps, the members of which were known as "hirdmen" (*hirðmenn*).

The author of the *Speculum Regale* advises all who wish to enter the guard to appear before the king with a spokesman. On coming to the court they are told to seek out those who are in the habit of presenting such requests to the king and to cultivate their friendship. The most favorable time would be when the king was at the table, as he would then most likely be in good humor.⁸ If the king agreed to receive the man, one of the higher officials of the guard, the marksman or the staller, would submit the matter to the assembled hirdmen. Should any one present object to granting the request, the matter would be laid over until the objections could be investigated; these might be based on ancestry, earlier record or the like.⁹ Apparently no man could become a hirdman without the free consent of the guild membership.

The Court Law also provides for an initiation ceremony closely resembling that of homage, of which it was probably an adaptation,¹⁰ though it is also possible that the two ceremonies may have developed independently from some ancient custom prevailing in the Germanic *comitatus*.¹¹ The king was in his high-seat with his guard grouped about him; across his knees lay a sword, his right hand grasping the hilt. The candidate approached, knelt, touched the sword-hilt and kissed the royal hand. He then arose and took the oath of fealty. Kneeling once more he placed his folded hands between those of the king and kissed his new lord. The officiating trencher-swain then led him to his new comrades from whom he received the hand and kiss of fellowship.¹²

⁷ *Hirð* is probably derived from the Old English *hired*, household, frequently a royal household.

⁸ *Spec. Reg.*, 67 (xxx.).

⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 422: *H.* 30.

¹⁰ But the two must not be confused; the kingsman was not a vassal.

¹¹ In the complaint of the *Wanderer*, an Old English poem from the seventh century or earlier (see Wülker's *Grundriss zur Geschichte der Angelsächsischen Literatur*), the minstrel calls to mind "how at one time his war-lord he kissed and embraced, laying his hands and his head on the chieftain's knee, when in days of yore he enjoyed the gift-seat" (ll. 41-44). There can be no doubt that the singer refers to his initiation into his lord's following. In several important particulars—the kneeling (which is implied), the kiss, the placing of the hand—this ceremony resembles the one described in the Court Law; the "sword-touching" is not alluded to, but this particular act was not required of all who entered the royal service, as will be seen elsewhere in this paper.

¹² *N. G. L.*, II. 422-423: *H.* 31.

While it was usual to admit only voluntary applicants to the guard, this rule was sometimes broken; the king occasionally solicited members, and at times even commanded men to join the hird.¹³ On the death of the king, the men were released from their oaths; but it was customary for the new ruler to receive the former henchmen into his own guard.¹⁴ As the Norse constitution permitted a divided kingship, it would sometimes happen that the kingdom had several courts, each of the joint rulers maintaining his own.¹⁵ In one instance a kingsman appears to have served in two such guards at the same time.¹⁶

The duties of the hirdman are summed up in the oath of initiation: to be faithful to his lord in open and in secret; to follow the king at home and abroad, and never to leave his court without permission, except under stress of great necessity.¹⁷ His particular duty was to guard the king's life and person;¹⁸ the corps was therefore chosen from "all that was strongest and stoutest, both of folk of the land and of outlanders".¹⁹ In battle the hirdmen were grouped about the king;²⁰ the bravest and strongest were with him on shipboard;²¹ they sat around him and before him in the public assemblies.²² Of the regular guards at court the sources speak of two: the day-guard or "following" (*fylgð*) and the night-guard or ward (*vörðr*).²³ Of the latter there were two divisions—the inner-ward (*innvörðr*) also called head-ward (*höfuðvörðr*) and the outer-ward (*utvörðr*).²⁴ The head-ward was stationed near the king's person, usually outside the door of the chamber where he slept;²⁵ it was composed, it seems, of hirdmen only. The outer-ward was placed at a greater distance and was normally made up of gests.²⁶ Owing to its great length, the winter night was divided

¹³ *Orvar-Odd's Saga* (Halle, 1892), c. 41; *Egil's Saga* (Halle, 1894), c. 25.

¹⁴ *N. G. L.*, II. 399; *H.* 11. In such cases the oath alone was required.

¹⁵ Snorre, *King Ingi's Saga*, III. 385, 387, cc. 26, 27.

¹⁶ *Flateyarbok*, III. 126, 127. Mention is made of two brothers who were henchmen of both King Hakon and Duke Skuli. A somewhat similar case is recorded in early English history. See Larson, *King's Household in England*, p. 95.

¹⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 425-426; *H.* 34.

¹⁸ *Spec. Reg.*, 63 (xxix.).

¹⁹ Snorre, *Olaf Trygvesson's Saga*, I. 352, c. 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I. 352, c. 101.

²² *Flateyarbok*, II. 645.

²³ *N. G. L.*, II. 414; *H.* 25; 424; *H.* 33.

²⁴ Snorre, *Olaf Trygvesson's Saga*, I. 206, c. 48.

²⁵ *Id.*, *Saga of Magnus the Blind*, III. 342, c. 17; see also *Didrik's Saga* (ed. Unger, Christiania, 1853), c. 228.

²⁶ *N. G. L.*, II. 441, 442; *H.* 46.

into two watch periods, the guards changing at midnight.²⁷ The outer-guards went to their duty heavily armed, and in times of special danger each guardsman was further provided with a trumpet.²⁸ All irregularities with respect to this service were heavily punished with fines or dismissal in disgrace.²⁹

The day-guard was ordinarily composed of six men, one walking on each side of the king and four at a proper distance behind.³⁰ On certain festive occasions and when the king entertained distinguished visitors, the number was increased to twelve, and the highest dignitaries of the court and the realm were then called into service.³¹ The guard reported when the chapel bell rang for matins and at once proceeded to the sanctuary to join the king in worship. During the remainder of the day they remained in the king's presence or wherever he ordered them to be. When serving in the "following" the hirdman wore his best clothes and bore his best weapons—helmet, shield and sword. As the king might have tasks to assign to those who were not acting as day-guards, it was customary for the henchmen to take a stand somewhere near the royal chambers where they might be easily found if wanted.³²

As the name of the guard is clearly borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon,³³ it would not be strange if the institution itself should reveal Old English influence in its general organization and character. On the make-up of the English guard, the Anglo-Saxon sources give us no satisfactory information; but there are indications that the men were grouped in day-guards and night-guards much as they were at the Norse court in later times. The Norwegian king who attended morning worship with his following of six henchmen was, perhaps, continuing an old custom that prevailed in Northumbria in the seventh century when King Oswy visited Colman's church attended by "five or six thegns".³⁴ Of the two forces holding night-guard, the inner-guard (head-ward) seems to be mentioned in *Beowulf*, where we are told that Wiglaf kept head-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 424, 425: *H.* 33. The ringing to matins was the signal for dismissal.

²⁸ *N. G. L.*, II. 441-442: *H.* 46. *Luðr*, not exactly a trumpet, rather a species of Alpine horn.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 424-425: *H.* 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 423-424: *H.* 32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 414-415: *H.* 25. In no case was the following to be composed of new henchmen, and no person with whom the king was angry would be permitted to serve.

³² *Spec. Reg.*, 81 (xxxvii.).

³³ See above, p. 461.

³⁴ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, book III., c. 26.

ward over his dead lord.³⁵ The same term (*heafodweard*) is used in the *Rectitudines* for a peculiar service that the thegn owes to the king.³⁶ The service reappears in *Domesday* under the name of *inguardus* (inner-ward), a duty that certain socmen of Cambridge-shire would be called on to perform "if the king should come into the shire".³⁷ The fact that these men were not resident at court should cause no difficulty; the Norse king also had a number of non-resident henchmen who had particular duties to perform when the king came into their part of the realm.³⁸ It seems probable that the mysterious term *avera*, which is coupled with *inguardus* in an entry in *Domesday* and which was also a service due "when the king came into the shire",³⁹ is another survival of ancient custom connected with the royal court.

The hirdmen also had a place in the council of the realm whenever the king should choose to call one.⁴⁰ They took a prominent part in coronation ceremonies and in the election of a king in cases of disputed inheritance or failure of heirs.⁴¹ The royal council met whenever the king chose, but all matters pertaining to the installation of a new ruler had to be transacted at a grand council in Thronthjem, in which the hirdmen sat with abbots and bishops.⁴²

In return for his services the henchman received a regular pay in coin or bullion paid out on the eighth day of the Yule festival. If money was lacking, dishes and jewels were broken up, weighed and distributed.⁴³ In addition the more favored received gifts, especially swords, arm rings and the use of royal estates.⁴⁴ In

³⁵ *Beowulf*, ll. 2906-2910. A similar case is recorded in the Norse sources of the reign of Hakon IV., who died in 1263. It was determined to place a head-watch at his tomb and keep it there till the end of the winter. *Flateyrbok*, III. 230.

³⁶ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, I. 444. The *geneat* owes the same duty to his lord.

³⁷ *Domesday Book*, I. 190 (see Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, p. 130). "[Sochemanni in Fuleberne] reddunt . . . 12 equos et 12 inguardos si rex in vice-comitatu veniret . . ." The "inward seems to be the duty of forming a body guard for the king while he is in the shire". (Maitland.)

³⁸ See below, p. 466.

³⁹ *Domesday Book*, I. 139, 190.

⁴⁰ Such assemblies were attended by archbishops, earls, bishops, landed-men and hirdmen. *Spec. Reg.*, 64 (xxx.); *Dipl. Norv.*, VII. 116-118. Cf. the Old English *witenagemot*.

⁴¹ *N. G. L.*, I. 4, 263; II. 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Flateyrbok*, III. 134, 229. Cf. Munch, *Norges Kongesagaer*, II. 280.

⁴⁴ Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 79, c. 60; *Harold Hardrada's Saga*, III. 86, c. 24. The arm ring was a peculiar sign of the henchman's service. See the stories of Thormod and Thorir in Snorre's version of *St. Olaf's Saga*. Thorir was accused of being Cnut's man. At a feast King Olaf stroked his arm above the

times of war extra rewards appear to have been given.⁴⁵ But, on the whole, service in the king's garth was not a very gainful occupation. To be ranked with the kingsmen was, however, a mark of great distinction, and the honor was eagerly sought.⁴⁶ When at court the hirdman ate regularly at the king's table.⁴⁷ If captured in battle or otherwise, he was generally sure of a ransom.⁴⁸ For such as were rendered completely helpless in the royal service, the king was pledged to provide a home; the very poor among the aged hirdmen were placed in some monastic institution, the king and the guard each paying half of the expenses connected with such an arrangement. To provide a fund for this purpose an initiation fee of an öre silver was collected from all who were admitted to the hird and half an öre from those who entered the corps of gests or candle-swains.⁴⁹ In 1308 steps were taken toward providing a hospital for the sick and an asylum for the aged and unfortunate in connection with the royal chapel at Oslo. For the support of this, the king donated a considerable sum and provided for fees much as before, only that greater sums were now to be collected.⁵⁰

The business of the guild was transacted at the "hird-gemot" (*hirðstefna*). When the signal was sounded on the trumpet, it was the duty of every hirdman to inquire as to the reason for the call and to hasten to the assembly.⁵¹ Ordinarily the meetings were held in a hall that was used for such purposes mainly.⁵² Those who were absent without good excuse were fined an öre silver; three offences meant forfeiture of membership. Each corps had its own signal and its own *gemot*; those who were not called were forbidden

elbow. Said Thorir, "Touch it gently there; I have a boil on the arm." He was forced to show the ring; it was Cnut's gift and Thorir was slain, II. 341-342, c. 175; 439, c. 246 (story of Thormod); 337, c. 172 (sword-gifts). See also *Karlamagnus Saga* (Christiania, 1860), viii, 4, 487.

⁴⁵ *Fagrskinna*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ *Spec. Reg.*, 58 (xxvi.).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 63 (xxix.).

⁴⁸ *N. G. L.*, II. 448: *H.* 53. The king and the guild provided the ransom money, but the liberated kingsman was in duty bound to restore the sum, at least in part.

⁴⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 448: *H.* 53. But a part of this fund was used to provide masses for the dead.

⁵⁰ The funds were placed in the hands of four men, two clerics chosen by the king and two hirdmen chosen by the hird. *Ibid.*, III. 78-80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II. 437: *H.* 42. Ordinarily such meetings were called by the king, but on occasions it seems that members, perhaps the chiefs, might order the signal to be given. See *Flatøyarbok*, III. 14-16. (1217.)

⁵² *Dipl. Norv.*, I. 104. (Bergen, 1308.) ". . . this charter was drawn up in the hall in the king's garth where gemots are held".

to attend.⁵³ Serious matters, such as treason,⁵⁴ riots⁵⁵ or quarrels within the guard, were brought up at these meetings. The henchmen were expected to treat each other as brethren, to assist one another in trouble and to see that justice was done to all; but the ideal of good-fellowship was hard to attain.⁵⁶ Apparently the marksman and the staller had or came to have some judicial authority at these sessions;⁵⁷ the marksman collected certain fines, perhaps he also assessed them.⁵⁸ But there is clear evidence that in serious cases some sort of a jury was employed; when a dignitary within the guard is accused of treason, says the Court Law, "there shall be named twelve of the most discreet men, who shall investigate whether the man can be rightfully convicted of the crime or not".⁵⁹ The *hirðstefna* was evidently an ancient institution in the thirteenth century; it seems to have been introduced into the English royal household in the reign of Cnut, for we find distinct traces of an organization exercising judicial authority over and among the English house-carles in the days of Edward the Confessor.⁶⁰

Thus far we have spoken of the guard as a corps of warriors that remained continuously at the king's residence. But there were also hirdmen abroad in the realm looking after the royal interests everywhere; these spent only a part, often a very small part, of their time at court.⁶¹ We are told that Saint Olaf kept sixty hirdmen, thirty gests and thirty house-carles continuously at his garth,⁶² and that one of his successors, Olaf the Quiet (1066-1093), doubled the numbers.⁶³ But this total, two hundred and forty, does not represent the entire number of kingsmen; counting the candle-swains and the hirdmen whose homes were elsewhere, we should find the number much larger. Apparently there was a tendency to

⁵³ *N. G. L.*, II. 437: *H.* 42. Fines were collected by the marksman. The henchmen were also fined for neglecting to appear at funerals of comrades. The money collected was used to pay for masses for the dead.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 408: *H.* 20.

⁵⁵ After a riot in which Skuli was concerned the king gave the signal for a *hirðstefna*; the henchmen demanded satisfaction and the earl submitted to the judgment of good men. *Flateyarbok*, III. 34-35. (1218.)

⁵⁶ *N. G. L.*, II. 436: *H.* 41.

⁵⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 411: *H.* 22; III. 64 (decree of 1303).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See also *H.* 42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 408: *H.* 20; cf. *Flateyarbok*, III. 34-35.

⁶⁰ See Larson, *King's Household in England*, pp. 165-167.

⁶¹ Such were found even in Iceland. See *Flateyarbok*, III. 205; *Laxdöla Saga* (ed. Kaalund, Copenhagen, 1889-1891), c. 20; *Sturlunga Saga* (ed. Vigfusson), II. 386. The laws suppose their presence everywhere; see *H.* 34.

⁶² *Fagrskinna*, p. 150; Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 67, c. 55.

⁶³ Snorre, *Saga of Olaf the Quiet*, III. 194, c. 4; *Fagrskinna*, p. 150.

increase the force of absentee-henchmen with the result that the character of the corps as a whole suffered an appreciable decline.⁶⁴

In the earlier centuries of the Norse *comitatus* there may have existed a relative equality among the henchmen, but such was not the case in the later Middle Ages. By that time a system of classes had developed within the hird, two of which stand out with some distinctness: the "landed-men" and the "trencher-swains". Just when these classes first began to appear we do not know; Snorre seems to believe that Olaf the Quiet was the first king to employ trencher-swains,⁶⁵ but it is not likely that their service was wholly an innovation of that reign. Though not hirdmen in the narrower sense, the landed-men and the trencher-swains were always classed as such; they were chosen from the hird, they retained their membership in the guild and were never wholly excused from the guardsmen's duty. In the one case the mark of distinction was social position and political influence; in the other, an important service in the king's hall.

The landed-men, as such, were neither servants nor officials. Apparently they were members of powerful families whom the king wished to bind closely to the crown.⁶⁶ To accomplish this he admitted them into his guard and endowed them with valuable fiefs. Outside the princely order they were the highest dignitaries in the land. Each landed-man was allowed to maintain a guard of forty house-carles, or more if the king permitted it.⁶⁷ As Norway rarely had a duke or an earl, the landed-men ranked next to the king in popular estimation. In return for honors received they assumed certain military duties, but especially did they bind themselves to watch over the king's interests in their parts of the realm. Still, they had no jurisdiction, they were not officials except when the king invested them with a recognized office.⁶⁸ Their powers were derived from wealth and family connections. Keyser believes that they were originally chiefs of the Norse hundred;⁶⁹ but this opinion can hardly be correct, as in that case the number of landed-men would have been great, while as a matter of fact the opposite seems

⁶⁴ In the early years of the fourteenth century there is much complaint that these men are neglectful of duty; they refuse to serve in the host, to attend the courts, to testify, to keep oaths, etc. See *N. G. L.*, III. 56, 66, 68, 90 (royal decrees dating from 1303 and 1311).

⁶⁵ Snorre, *Saga of Olaf the Quiet*, III. 193, c. 3.

⁶⁶ Sars, *Udsigt over den Norske Historie*, II. 16 ff.

⁶⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 407: *H.* 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, V., index: *lendr maðr*.

⁶⁹ Keyser, *Efterladte Skrifter* (Christiania, 1867), II. 107-109.

to have been true. In the closing decades of the twelfth century there seem to have been but five men of this rank in the kingdom.⁷⁰ In the reign of King Hakon IV. (1217-1263) the saga frequently speaks of nine.⁷¹ In all probability we have in this institution a faint reflection of feudal vassallage.

The dignity was conferred in the hirdmen's hall at one of the great festivals. Immediately after grace had been said the king would announce his intention to honor the candidate named. Two men of the highest rank present would then escort him to the high-seat; the king would rise, take him by the hand and lead him to a seat among the other landed-men.⁷² At the great Christmas and Easter festivals, the landed-men were required to be present at court and serve in the day-guard.⁷³ At coronation ceremonies they acted a prominent and very important part.⁷⁴ But only so long as the landed-man remained faithful to his lord, could he retain his honors; treason meant a trial in the hirdmen's *gemot*, and conviction meant forfeiture of all rights.⁷⁵ In 1277 it was decreed that the landed-men should henceforth be known as barons and lords.⁷⁶ A generation later (1308) it was determined to create no more barons,⁷⁷ and the dignity gradually disappeared.

"King Olaf had these court customs, to wit, that he let stand before his board trencher-swains (*skutilsveinar*), and they poured to him in board-beakers, and also to all men of high estate who sat at his table . . ." ⁷⁸ "They have the fairest service in the garth, and must be carefully trained."⁷⁹ To stand before the king's table and serve His Majesty with meat and drink was considered a great honor, and a place in this service was eagerly sought.⁸⁰ In

⁷⁰ *Historisk Tidsskrift*, second series, IV. 157-158.

⁷¹ Nine were with the king in 1235 (*Flateyrbok*, III. 111); the same number were present at the coronation in 1247 when a full attendance was to be expected (*ibid.*, 168); nine were with the king in the expedition against Scotland, 1263 (*ibid.*, 219-220).

⁷² *N. G. L.*, II. 406; *H.* 18. Snorre, the historian, was made a landed-man in 1220; his particular duty was to establish the king's authority in Iceland. *Flateyrbok*, III. 38.

⁷³ *N. G. L.*, II. 407; *H.* 19.

⁷⁴ *Flateyrbok*, III. 169-170, 212-213.

⁷⁵ *N. G. L.*, II. 408; *H.* 20.

⁷⁶ *Sturlunga Saga*, II. 382, appendix: *Islenzkir Annalar*, 1277.

⁷⁷ *N. G. L.*, III. 74 ff. Royal decree of June 17, 1308. King Hakon V. Magnusson (1299-1319) was a vigorous ruler and a firm believer in absolutism. The barons may also have abused their power during the minority of his brother Erik (1280-1299). See Keyser, *Efterladte Skrifter*, II. 107 ff.

⁷⁸ Snorre, *Saga of Olaf the Quiet*, III. 193, c. 3.

⁷⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 412-413; *H.* 24.

⁸⁰ *Fagrskinna*, p. 154.

rank the trencher-swains stood next to the landed-men.⁸¹ In addition to their duties at the royal table, the trencher-swains had certain important responsibilities with respect to the safety of the royal person. For a week's period two of these officials had complete charge of all arrangements looking toward peace and protection, especially at night. They placed the guards and made sure that all necessary precautions were taken against possible surprise.⁸² Usually the trencher-swains were excused from serving as guardsmen, but in time of war or special danger they were obliged to watch with the rest in their turn, the men in charge doing guard duty during the week of their special authority.⁸³ Like the other members of the hird, the trencher-swains might be called upon to perform a variety of other duties both in times of peace and of war.⁸⁴

It seems that a candidate for these honors had to serve an apprenticeship as cup-bearer in the royal hall. Appointments were always made at the close of a feast. An empty beaker was brought in and placed upon the king's table. The king handed it to the candidate who received it, kissing the royal hand; he then withdrew immediately but soon returned with the beaker filled with the king's beverage.⁸⁵ When the landed-men were given the baronial title (1277), the trencher-swains were advanced to knighthood, though it is likely that the promotion was one in title only.⁸⁶ When the baronage became extinct in the fourteenth century the knights were the highest order in the kingdom.⁸⁷

"It is known to most men", says the scribe of the Court Law, "that in the king's guard the gests (*gestir*) stand next to the hirdmen in title dignity and privileges."⁸⁸ These formed a smaller corps, in theory half as large as that of the hirdmen.⁸⁹ As in the

⁸¹ In the coronation procession they had a place next below the barons and above the marksman. *Flateyrbok*, III. 212-213.

⁸² This seems to be the meaning of the ambiguous term, *halda stöðu*. *N. G. L.*, II. 424, 447: *H.* 33, 51. Fritzner states in his Old Norse dictionary that some sort of a guard is meant, but this seems hardly probable. *Ordbog* (Christiania, 1867), *staða*.

⁸³ *N. G. L.*, II. 415: *H.* 25.

⁸⁴ A trencher-swain is mentioned as royal official in the Orkneys. *Flateyrbok*, III. 103-104.

⁸⁵ *N. G. L.*, II. 413: *H.* 24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 74 ff.

⁸⁷ I have been unable to find an institution elsewhere that exactly corresponds to the Norse table service, but the etymology of the term *skutilsvein* (from Lat. *scutella*, probably through A. S. *scutel*) would indicate a foreign origin.

⁸⁸ *N. G. L.*, II. 439: *H.* 43.

⁸⁹ Sixty in the days of Olaf the Quiet (1066-1093); thirty in the days of his father. *Fagrskinna*, p. 150.

case of the higher guard, admission to this guild was usually on application, the procedure being much the same in both instances. The ceremony of initiation was somewhat simpler, however: the applicant would kneel, touch the royal sword, kiss the king's hand and swear everlasting fidelity; after this he was introduced to his new associates who greeted him with a hand-clasp.⁹⁰

In general, the rights of the gests were similar to those of the hirdmen.⁹¹ In battle they were grouped with these about the royal colors;⁹² on sea they had their own ship which they sailed near to the royal dragon.⁹³ They had their own chief and their separate guild assembly.⁹⁴ At Yule-tide and the Easter festivals they were admitted to the king's tables, but not at other times.⁹⁵ Their wages were half as large as the hirdmen's pay,⁹⁶ and they contributed in like proportion to the fund for the sick and the aged.⁹⁷

The duties of the gests may be grouped into two leading classes: they served as the king's spies throughout the realm and rode his errands generally; at court they served in the outer-guard. The latter duty has already been described. As the greater number of the gests might be absent on the king's errands, it was permissible to allow men who were not henchmen to share this watch, but a certain number of gests must always be present. The gests might also serve in any other form of watch except the head-ward.⁹⁸ It was as the king's spies and messengers of death that these men performed their most acceptable services. It was their duty to learn what hostile movements were abroad, to forestall treason wherever possible, to cleanse the realm of their lord's enemies. Sometimes the king would dispatch his gests to slay an enemy, in which case they were allowed half of the wealth that they could carry away; the rest, including all the gold, belonged to the king.⁹⁹ The gests might also be sent on other errands, and when necessary they could call on all the kingsmen and local officials for assistance in carrying out their instructions.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰ *N. G. L.*, II. 439: *H.* 43.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, II. 440-441: *H.* 45.

⁹² Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 409, c. 221.

⁹³ *N. G. L.*, II. 440-441.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: *gestastefna*.

⁹⁵ *Spec. Reg.*, 60 (xxvii.).

⁹⁶ *Flateyarbok*, III. 229.

⁹⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 448: *H.* 53; III. 78-80.

⁹⁸ *N. G. L.*, II. 440-441: *H.* 45; *Spec. Reg.*, 60 (xxvii.).

⁹⁹ *Spec. Reg.*, 60 (xxvii.).

¹⁰⁰ *N. G. L.*, II. 439-440: *H.* 44. The Court Law warns against giving the gests such errands as are unreasonable, sinful or as imply the grant of too much power. The men are urged to be just and honest, to abstain from pillage, to spare the innocent and to respect the rights of women.

As the duties of the *gests* were such as might involve great dangers, they were chosen, not for courtly behavior or high connections, but for personal bravery and prowess. Asbiorn, in his speech against King Sverri, speaks of the king's *gests* as "the worst of men, the limbs of the very fiend"¹⁰¹ Though in the words of an enemy, this characterization no doubt contains a large measure of truth: to the readiness of these warriors to undertake bloody and dangerous tasks the sagas bear frequent testimony.¹⁰² It seems exceedingly strange, that in a country like medieval Norway, where courts were numerous and legal systems rigidly adhered to, such an institution could be permitted to exist. Realizing its seeming non-Germanic character, historians have sought its origin in Celtic and Slavic lands. A corps known as the *gosti* has been found in early Russia and some have thought that the Vikings and Verangians may have become acquainted with this on their journeys to Constantinople, where at least one of the Old Norse kings (Harold Hardrada) served in the imperial guard; but there seem to have been *gests* in Norway before the reign of this king. An attempt has also been made to connect the *gestir* with the twelve *gwestai* who collected the food rents of the Old Welsh kings; on the whole this seems the more plausible explanation, though in the present state of the evidence it is hardly more than a conjecture.¹⁰³

"[King Olaf] also had candle-swains (*kertisveinar*) who held up candles before his board, and as many of them as men of high degree sat there."¹⁰⁴ It is natural to think of these servants as pages, boys or at least youths;¹⁰⁵ but the sources do not support such a view. It is probable that the candle-service came in with the other new fashions that became current in the reign of Olaf the Quiet;¹⁰⁶ but the Norse rulers were not mere imitators—a foreign institution

¹⁰¹ *Flateyrbok*, II. 613.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, III. 227; Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 72, 77, 409, cc. 59, 221; *Magnus Barefoot's Saga*, III. 320, c. 5.

¹⁰³ *Ancient Laws of Wales*, p. 772 and glossary; Seebohm, *Tribal System in Wales*, p. 163; Steenstrup, *Danelag*, p. 124; Larson, *King's Household in England*, p. 174. Medieval Norse writers believed that the *gests* were given this name because they gusted the homes of so many men and not always in a friendly spirit *Spec. Reg.*, 59 (xxvii.).

¹⁰⁴ Snorre, *Saga of Olaf the Quiet*, III. 193, c. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Such seems to be Keyser's view. *Efterladte Skrifter*, II. 79, 80.

¹⁰⁶ "In the days of King Olaf . . . men began to take up new fashions, wearing pride-hosen laced to the bone; some clasped golden rings around their legs, and then men wore drag-kirtles laced to the side, sleeves five ells long, and so strait that they must be drawn by an armcord and trussed all up to the shoulder; high shoes withal, and all sewn with silk, and some embroidered with gold. Many other new-fangled fashions there were." Snorre, *Saga of Olaf the Quiet*, III. 192-193, c. 2.

transplanted to Norway soon took on a national stamp. That the Norse candle-bearers were men is evident from a variety of considerations. In addition to their regular duties in the banquet hall they might be called on to do service in the day-guard,¹⁰⁷ a duty that would hardly fall to a mere page; in time of war they fought with the other kingsmen;¹⁰⁸ they sailed their own ships, had a chief of their own appointed by the king and apparently had a guild organization like those of the higher corps;¹⁰⁹ in matters of household finance they ranked with the *gests* and shared with these in the privilege of asylum and similar benefits.¹¹⁰ As the candle-swains were to serve in the royal presence on occasions when courtly behavior was a prominent virtue, they were carefully chosen from good families after a close inquiry into their social position, wealth, abilities and behavior.¹¹¹ After the tables had been cleared but before the bowl of water for the king's hands had been brought in, the *seneschal* (*drotseti*) led the candidate toward the high-seat. The king extended his right hand over the table; the new kingsman took it in both his own, kissed it and vowed to be faithful in every service. After the ceremony the candle-swain assisted in washing the king's hands.¹¹² The men who held the candles were ranked among the henchmen (*handgengnir*: men who had gone to the king's hand) but not among the sword-takers (*sverðtakarar*: men who had touched the king's sword);¹¹³ they therefore occupied a lower place at court than *gests* and hirdmen.

Originally, we are told, all the kingsmen were known by the common name of house-carles (*huskarlar*); but in the thirteenth century this term was limited to the lowest class of royal servants, the men who performed the manual labor in the king's household:¹¹⁴ they were "to work all needful service in the garth and at whatso ingatherings were needful".¹¹⁵ They seem to have been organized like the other kingsmen with ship and chief (*ræðismaðr*) and guild laws.¹¹⁶ *Fagrskinna* tells us that in the eleventh century the house-carles were not counted among the henchmen;¹¹⁷ but a century

¹⁰⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 444: *H.* 47.

¹⁰⁸ *Flateyarbok*, III. 131, 225.

¹⁰⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 444: *H.* 47.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 448, 449; III. 79; *Flateyarbok*, III. 229.

¹¹¹ *N. G. L.*, II. 443, 444: *H.* 47.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 416: *H.* 26.

¹¹⁵ Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 67, c. 55. St. Olaf had thirty house-carles.

¹¹⁶ *Flateyarbok*, II. 582; *Spec. Reg.*, 58.

¹¹⁷ *Fagrskinna*, p. 150. Olaf the Quiet had sixty house-carles.

later they had, it seems, attained to this distinction.¹¹⁸ As there were absentee-hirdmen there were also house-carles who seldom appeared at court. These were often the sons of wealthy yeomen or even of landed-men who for a small fee, often for the honor merely of being known as kingsmen, or for the protection that went with this relationship, entered the royal service. Their duties were various: they might be called on to pilot the king's ship, to act as royal messengers, to serve as the king's merchants and especially to assist his majesty's local officials.¹¹⁹

Among these various corps the feeling was not always the most cordial. The difference in rank, in treatment and in fare naturally resulted in envy and jealousy which often flared up at the great festive gatherings when men had drunk too freely. King Magnus Erlingsson's gests "liked ill that the hirdmen drank mead while they were given ale"; the result was a riot (1181).¹²⁰ It sometimes happened that trouble arose between individual members of different guilds, and usually the quarrel was taken up by their comrades.¹²¹ In such cases the king seems to have exercised extensive judicial authority, assisted, no doubt, by the staller and the marksman, whose duty it was to attend all the meetings both of hirdmen and of gests.¹²²

A wholly different, though none the less important, organization centred about the royal chapel. In the first half of the eleventh century a bishop resided in the king's garth;¹²³ but that was while the land was still largely heathen. With the organization of dioceses the court-bishop disappears and his place is taken by the court-priest (*hirðprestr*). The Court Law provides for two such priests, one to shrive the king and his henchmen and one to have charge of the books, vestments and the like that belonged to the royal chapel. For these services the king gave them each five marks and two gowns at Yule-tide; the henchmen paid them one-thirtieth of their wages.¹²⁴ The chapel soon came to have the usual force

¹¹⁸ *Flateyrbok*, II. 541-542. "... seventy men went to the king's (Sverri's) hand; some were made hirdmen, some gests, some house-carles".

¹¹⁹ *Spec. Reg.*, 60, 61 (xxvii.). It is possible that some of these ranked higher than the house-carles at court, but the author of the *Speculum* makes no distinction.

¹²⁰ *Flateyrbok*, II. 593. The rioters were punished at the king's command.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, III. 60-61, 97.

¹²² *N. G. L.*, II. 411-412: *H.* 22-23.

¹²³ Snorre, *Olaf Trygvesson's Saga*, I. 315, c. 71; *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 205, 417, cc. 118, 229.

¹²⁴ *N. G. L.*, II. 410: *H.* 21.

of lower ecclesiastics,¹²⁵ and it also maintained a school of some importance.¹²⁶

In the early years of the twelfth century King Eystein erected two new churches for the use of his court, one in Bergen and one in the old capital, Thronthjem.¹²⁷ Later kings increased the number to fourteen.¹²⁸ At first the chapel-priests were appointed by the bishops in whose dioceses the churches happened to be located;¹²⁹ but in 1308 a decree went forth from Avignon which practically separated the chapel system from the national church administration. The appointments were given to the king and at the head of the entire group was placed a *magister capellarum*, who to all intents and purposes became a bishop. He was even allowed to wear episcopal robes, at first only when no bishop was present, but later on all occasions.¹³⁰ The significance of these arrangements is readily seen. The ambitions of the Norse episcopate had been a source of much annoyance to King Hakon's predecessors; of this the monarch would now be in part relieved. He had now his own priesthood, educated, perhaps, at his own chapel schools, appointed by himself, consecrated by his own bishop. Possibly he hoped to extend the system to all parts of the realm. But the bishops at once made war on this new organization and finally succeeded in having it condemned as contrary to canon law.¹³¹

II.

Of servants and officials to whom were assigned some particular line of duties or functions in the king's garth, the sources name a considerable number. Most of these were, however, servants of the lower order, such as we should expect to find in every extensive household of the age.¹³² Still, there were at the Norse court six officials that took a high rank: the butler, the seneschal, the treasurer, the marksman, the staller and the chancellor. Of these, all but two were chosen from among the hirdmen, the chancellor being always and the treasurer sometimes an ecclesiastic. The seneschal (*drotseti*—the word is probably a form of the German *Truchsess*)

¹²⁵ *Dipl. Norv.*, III. 107, 108: deans, canons, deacons, etc.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. 121 (1312-1319).

¹²⁷ Snorre, *Saga of Sigurd Jerusalem-farer*, III. 263, c. 15.

¹²⁸ *Dipl. Norv.*, I. 100 (1308).

¹²⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 464 (agreement of 1273).

¹³⁰ *Dipl. Norv.*, I. 100-103; *Historisk Tidsskrift*, first series, IV. 267-268. The office was given to the dean of the Church of the Apostles in Bergen.

¹³¹ *Dipl. Norv.*, I. 90-91, 107, 115-117; IV. 80, 91. The pretext urged was that the king's priests interfered in the affairs of the regular parishes and deprived the parish priests of their income.

¹³² Such are cooks, butlers, door-wards, horse-wards, smiths, trumpeters, bed-swains, shoe-swains and the like.

and the chief butler (*skenkjari*) were, in the thirteenth century, household officials only. With the advice of his friends the king selected, according to the Court Law, two men from among the trencher-swains most suitable in descent and deportment to fill these offices. If the king should find more suitable candidates outside the corps of hirdmen, he might appoint them; but first he must elevate them to the dignities of henchmen and trencher-swains.¹³³

The *drotseti* of the fourteenth century was, however, a wholly different official from his predecessor of the thirteenth. In 1319 Magnus, a child of three years, was chosen king of Norway and Sweden. The regency that controlled affairs in Norway did not give a satisfactory rule, and at a council held in 1323 a regent was appointed with the title of *drotseti*.¹³⁴ The seneschal was now the highest civil official in the state. In this sense the office continued till near the close of the century.¹³⁵

The king's treasurer (*fehirdir*), though doubtless a very ancient and useful servant at court, is rarely mentioned in the sources as a prominent official. It seems that an ecclesiastic (often the king's chaplain, perhaps) usually had charge of the royal treasury;¹³⁶ but at times it was also placed in secular hands. That the office was considered important is evidenced by the fact that Anders Plytt, who held it in 1263, was classed among the landed-men.¹³⁷ During the period under survey the treasurer seems to have been with the king in the garth, but in the fourteenth century we find four such functionaries, one in each of the leading cities.¹³⁸ Whether one of these still was regarded as the regular court treasurer, as some have thought,¹³⁹ is somewhat doubtful, as all seem to have had certain duties with respect to the kingsmen that were formerly performed in the king's garth.¹⁴⁰

It seems probable that in the earlier years of the Norse monarchy

¹³³ *N. G. L.*, II. 415: *H.* 26.

¹³⁴ The regent chosen was Erling Vidkunsson, a knight (hirdman) and the wealthiest man in the realm. See any good history of Norway.

¹³⁵ But the office was not continuously filled. The *drotseti* ruled only when a minor held the throne or when the king was unable to reside in the kingdom. See Keyser, *Efterladte Skrifter*, II. 93.

The seneschal's office was, of course, to be found everywhere in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, but the etymology of the Norse title would indicate that this office was contributed by the Empire.

¹³⁶ *Spec. Reg.*, 186. Appendix.

¹³⁷ *Flateyarbok*, III. 219, 225.

¹³⁸ *N. G. L.*, III. 79.

¹³⁹ Keyser, *Efterladte Skrifter*, II. 105.

¹⁴⁰ The four treasurers are instructed as to the payment of fees to the henchmen, how much each shall be paid and in what. They are also told to have the Court Law read to them, but formerly the law was always read to the assembled guard in the royal hall at the Christmas festivities. *N. G. L.*, III. 79.

the marksman (*merkismaðr*) was the highest official at court. He is alluded to in the court poetry of the early eleventh century,¹⁴¹ and everywhere in the sagas he appears as a warrior of great distinction.¹⁴² The marksman was entrusted with the king's banner;¹⁴³ in naval fights he held it in the prow of the royal dragon, with the stem-men, the fiercest and mightiest of the king's guard, grouped about him.¹⁴⁴ The law required that he should always be near the king; he was always to sleep in the king's garth, on the king's ship or wherever the king might be. At court he acted as judge or arbitrator,¹⁴⁵ and the tendency seems to have been to increase his judicial functions.¹⁴⁶ In the thirteenth century, however, the marksman's dignity was evidently passing; he still ranked with the landed-men, but he was no longer the first official at court,¹⁴⁷ the staller and the chancellor having risen above him. With the death of the last marksman in 1320 the office became extinct.

In St. Olaf's hall, as Snorre describes it, there were two high-seats, one for the king on the north side and a lower one directly across. In the lower high-seat sat the staller (*stallari*), an official of great prominence, for a time the highest dignitary at court.¹⁴⁸ Snorre repeatedly refers to the staller in his history, and he is also alluded to in the verses of the eleventh century scalds.¹⁴⁹ Usually the sources speak of but one staller, though at times there might be several.¹⁵⁰ In the poems the staller appears mainly as a war-chief; but in the sagas we find him performing certain important civil duties as well. At great public gatherings, such as the national assemblies, he acted as an intermediary between the king and the yeomanry, presenting the requests of the populace and urging the wishes of the ruler. He performed similar functions in the king's garth.¹⁵¹ "At every 'thing' Biörn stood up and spake the king's

¹⁴¹ Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 412-413, c. 224: the poet Sighvat quoted.

¹⁴² *Egil's Saga*, c. 16, says distinctly that the marksman was the first man at court. See also Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 128, 430, 429, cc. 84, 238, 239, *et passim*.

¹⁴³ *N. G. L.*, II. 411-412: *H.* 23. There were several banners in the host; the marksman bore that of the king. *Flateyrbok*, III. 138.

¹⁴⁴ Snorre, *Harold Fairhair's Saga*, I. 98-99, c. 9.

¹⁴⁵ *N. G. L.*, II. 411-412: *H.* 23.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 64: decree of 1303; this apparently made the marksman the chief judge at court.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II. 411: *H.* 23.

¹⁴⁸ Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 67, c. 55. So splendidly was the staller attired at times that he was mistaken for the king himself. See *id.*, *Olaf Tryggvesson's Saga*, I. 374, c. 120; *Magnus Barefoot's Saga*, III. 240-241, c. 26.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 93, 333-334, 433, cc. 70, 170, 240. (Sighvat.)

¹⁵⁰ There were two in 1066. *Fagrskinna*, p. 135. The Court Law sometimes uses the plural form in speaking of the staller.

¹⁵¹ *N. G. L.*, II. 411: *H.* 22.

errand", says the Icelandic historian in speaking of St. Olaf's famous staller.¹⁵² Elsewhere we read of this same Biörn as being sent to Sweden on a diplomatic mission.¹⁵³ He was also a warrior as all the stallers were.¹⁵⁴ In battle they frequently commanded a division of the royal host¹⁵⁵ or one of the principal ships of the king's fleet.¹⁵⁶ When the king travelled by land the staller had some duties with regard to the stable service: he saw that horses and other equipments were properly provided.¹⁵⁷ The staller's connection with this service has led historians to believe that there is a direct connection between his office and that of the Frankish constable. The title itself seems to point to the same origin, though it appears more likely that *stallari* is derived from Old Norse *stallr* than from Latin *stabularius*. But even if we grant that the staller's title and certain of his functions were introduced from abroad, the probabilities are that these were applied or added to an office that was already enjoying a vigorous existence. The sister kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden each had a marshal (*marsk*, clearly derived from some form of O. H. G. *marashalh*—*mariscalcus*, marshal) who served as the highest military functionary in the realm and thus corresponded to the constable of Capetian France; but Norway never had such an official. The staller's chief and characteristic duty was to act as the king's spokesman. A glance at the medieval Norse constitution will reveal the importance of this function. The early Norwegian kings were not absolute monarchs; they had to consider public opinion and seek popular consent in all matters of consequence. The nation was divided into four grand jurisdictions, each with its own assembly; at these gatherings the king often appeared to consult with his fellow-freemen,¹⁵⁸ and it is readily seen that an official who possessed the gifts of oratory and diplomatic sense combined with the prestige of military leadership would be of great service to his lord.¹⁵⁹ It was probably such an official that the Danish conquerors introduced into England in the eleventh century.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² Snorre, *St. Olaf's Saga*, II. 88, c. 68; see also cc. 59, 91.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, c. 67, 86. See also *Flateyarbok*, III. 118, 219.

¹⁵⁴ He fell at Stiklestad, 1030. Snorre, II. 432, c. 240.

¹⁵⁵ *Flateyarbok*, II. 547.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II. 583; *Fagrskinna*, p. 129.

¹⁵⁷ *N. G. L.*, II. 411: *H.* 22.

¹⁵⁸ See Keyser, *Efterladte Skrifter*, II., or any good Norwegian history.

¹⁵⁹ The staller spoke on the king's behalf in his absence and also quite generally when he was present; the Norse rulers with the exception of Sverri do not seem to have been orators.

¹⁶⁰ Larson, *King's Household in England*, p. 147.

But as royalty grew stronger the usefulness of the spokesman naturally grew less prominent; in the thirteenth century the king's chief servant was not the staller but a new functionary, the chancellor. There seems to be no direct evidence for the existence of a Norse chancery before the thirteenth century; but charters and other documents were drawn up at court before that time,¹⁶¹ and a royal seal was in use,¹⁶² so there can be little doubt that the institution did have an earlier existence. The chancellor's title may have come in at a later date, but the fact that the Court Law awards this official the highest rank at court¹⁶³ suggests that the office must have existed already for a period of some length. The probabilities are that the chancery was introduced into Norway from England with the royal chapel service in the eleventh century.¹⁶⁴ In addition to his duties in the royal *scriptorium* and additional ones that the king might assign, the chancellor seems to have exercised those of a modern comptroller. "He shall also keep most careful accounts of the crown possessions, including such as are acquired . . . also of those lands that the king may grant to certain of his men and in what year of grace the grant be made. Further he shall make sure that the books containing the land rents due to the king are properly kept, that what should be added is added and that what should be cancelled is cancelled."¹⁶⁵ The office seems always to have been held by an ecclesiastic: Aki, who was Duke Hakon's chancellor (1293-1299), was a deacon of the royal chapel in Bergen;¹⁶⁶ later, when his lord succeeded to the kingship, he was made dean of the royal chapel at Oslo where the king's residence now was.¹⁶⁷ In 1314 the chancellor's office was permanently associated with the deanship of this church. As this arrangement definitely located the chancery at Oslo and prevented the chancellor from travelling about with the king as freely as might be necessary, a vice-chancellor was provided for by the same decree, to whom were entrusted the royal seal and conscience when the king was absent from the capital.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ See *Dipl. Norv.*

¹⁶² The earl of the Orkneys had a chancellor as early as 1190. *Ibid.*, II. 2, no. 2. Seals were in use when Snorre (1177-1241) wrote his history. *Magnus Erlingsson's Saga*, c. 25. Magnus ruled from 1162 to 1184.

¹⁶³ *N. G. L.*, II. 410: *H.* 22.

¹⁶⁴ Larson, *King's Household in England*, p. 197 ff.

¹⁶⁵ *N. G. L.*, II. 409: *H.* 21.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 23. (1293.) He was a canon in 1296. *Dipl. Norv.*, IV. 15.

¹⁶⁷ *Dipl. Norv.*, II. 72; IV. 94-95.

¹⁶⁸ *Dipl. Norv.*, I. 127. The vice-chancellor was appointed by the king from among his chapel priests, the chancellor advising; he received one-fourth of the revenues of the seal when actually serving; he was competent to act at any time and place if for any reason the chancellor could not serve.

The chancellor was invested with his office at a special meeting of the henchmen; apparently all the various corps attended. "Then shall the king make known to all that he gives to the man that is named his seal with all the honors that go with it." When this had been proclaimed, the new dignitary would kneel and swear to serve faithfully, especially to conceal what the king wished to be kept secret.¹⁶⁹ The marksman was invested in much the same way; in his case the symbol employed was the banner.¹⁷⁰ The staller's office was conferred in the royal dining-hall. After grace had been said and the king's intentions had been announced, two trencher-swains led forth the chosen one; the king rose, took him by the hand and escorted him to the staller's high-seat.¹⁷¹ In the cases of the other court officials the appointments appear to have been made without any accompanying ceremonial.

The rewards and privileges of these officials were first of all those that they enjoyed as the king's henchmen, as members of the royal hird. In addition there was the enjoyment of official dignity and authority, a seat among the barons when the king entertained his magnates and a certain definite income usually awarded in the form of a landed benefice. The chancellor, while not exactly a member of the hird, shared fully in these benefits. His official income was somewhat smaller than that of the staller or the marksman, but as he was permitted to collect a fee for almost every document prepared, it seems likely that his office proved to be a source of abundant revenue.¹⁷²

The history of Norway in the fourteenth century is a record of great calamities and broken fortunes. The king's household shared in the general decline. Hakon V., the last vigorous ruler of medieval Norway, reduced the importance of the hird by abolishing the baronage: as a believer in absolutism he naturally feared an order that was rapidly developing into an aristocracy. After his death (1319) came half a century of much confusion, caused in part by the terrors of the Black Death and in part by unwise attempts to unite the crowns of Norway and Sweden. From 1380 to 1905, the country was ruled by foreign kings. After 1319 the hird gradually disintegrated. A royal household in the medieval sense could not exist without a resident king.

LAURENCE M. LARSON.

¹⁶⁹ *N. G. L.*, II. 409-410: *H.* 21.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 411-412: *H.* 23.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*: *H.* 22. Cf. the method of admitting hirdmen to the baronage.

¹⁷² *N. G. L.*, II. 409, 411, 446: *H.* 21-22, 49-50; III. 77-78.